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ANALYSIS BRANCH
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FROM : Amembassy SAIGON DATE: July 7, 1967

SUBJECT : Biographic Information: Nguyen Luu Vien

REF : Saigon A-638
S/S EXDIS SGC

As mentioned in reference airgram (last paragraph), we are providing the following information on Nguyen Luu Vien, who is a possibility for Prime Minister or other cabinet level positions in the new Vietnamese government.

Vien has served in a series of post-Diem governments: he served as Minister of Interior in the Nguyen Khanh government, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior in the Tran Van Huong government, and as Deputy Prime Minister and Commissioner for Cultural Affairs in the present government. In 1965 he was mentioned by Phan Khac Suu as a possible replacement for then Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat.

Vien is an old friend of Tran Van Huong, and over the years Vien's name has been linked in various ways with that of Phan Khac Suu. Therefore, it is possible that either of these leading presidential contenders might choose Vien as Prime Minister, or perhaps as the perennial Deputy Prime Minister.

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Originally, our evaluation of Vien as a possible Prime Minister derived largely from his known relationship to Nguyen Cao Ky, and now that Ky has stepped down to run as Vice Presidential candidate with Nguyen Van Thieu, Vien's chances would seem to have diminished somewhat. On the other hand, we know very little about Vien's relations with General Thieu, except that he has appeared recently at both Thieu-oriented and Ky-oriented functions. Tenuous as it may be, it would at least give the impression that he is on good terms with Thieu as well as with Ky.

Vien has a long standing, personal and working relationship with Ky. It was probably strained during the Cabinet crisis of last Fall, however. The major point of disagreement between Ky and Vien of which we are now aware, is Vien's desire to get rid of security chief General Loan. In fact, it has been reported that Vien feels strongly that the government should be gradually civilianized. Ky reportedly opposed the nomination of Vien for Prime Minister in early 1965 on the basis that the Prime Minister should be a military man, but Ky's position on this matter might well be different in the future if military men (Thieu and Ky) occupied both the Presidency and Vice Presidency.

Vien is a southerner. He is also a Buddhist, but cooperated with Ky in the successful moves against the Buddhist "struggle" of last year. In previous years, he was active in opposition to the French and to Diem.

American officials have found Vien to be able, intelligent, pleasant and cooperative, and we see no reason why there should be any difficulty in working effectively with Vien, if he were named Prime Minister or Minister in a future government.

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SUBJECT: BIO, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES:
DUONG VAN MINH - TRAN NGOC LIENG

REF: SAIGON 76; SAIGON 154

1. DUONG VAN MINH IS A 51-YEAR OLD SOUTHERN BUDDHIST RETIRED FULL GENERAL AND FORMER CHIEF OF STATE WHO HAS BEEN LIVING OVERSEAS SINCE HIS REMOVAL FROM POLITICS IN LATE 1964. TRAN NGOC LIENG IS A 44-YEAR OLD SOUTHERN BUDDHIST ATTORNEY WHO WAS SOCIAL WELFARE COMMISSIONER IN 1965 AND 1966.

2. MINH WAS BORN IN MY THO, DINH TUONG PROVINCE, SOUTHERN VIET-NAM, IN 1916. HE ATTENDED CHASSEL UPJKO.UGIJL*LYCEE IN SAIGON AND GRADUATED IN 1936. IN 1940 HE JOINED THE FRENCH COLONIAL ARMY, AND IN 1942 WAS COMMISSIONED SECOND LIEUTENANT. WHEN THE JAPANESE ATTEMPTED THEIR COUP IN 1945 HE FOUGHT AGAINST THEM BUT WAS CAPTURED AND TORTURED BY HAVING ALL BUT ONE OF HIS FRONT TEETH EXTRACTED. HE WAS RELEASED ONE MONTH LATER.

3. IN 1945 MINH WAS PROMOTED TO FIRST LIEUTENANT AND PUT AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE FRENCH-BACKED SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. IN 1952 HE WAS INTEGRATED IN) THE NEW VIETNAMESE ARMY AND SENT TO THE ECOLE SUPERIEURE DE GUERRE IN PARIS, FROM WHICH HE GRADUATED IN 1953, RETURNING HOME TO BECOME CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE FIRST MILITARY REGION. IN 1955 HE WAS APPOINTED COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE REGION'S SAIGON-CHOLON SUBDIVISION, IN WHICH CAPACITY HE CONDUCTED OPERATION HOANG DIEU IN THE RUNG SAT JUNGLE SOUTH OF SAIGON AGAINST THE BINH XUYEN ARMY.

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4. IN NOVEMBER 1955 MINH WAS PROMOTED TO BRIGADIER GENERAL AND IN JANUARY 1956 HE WAS GIVEN FULL AUTHORITY IN THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE DISSIDENT HOA HAO ARMIES IN THE SOUTHWEST. IN AUGUST 1956 HE WAS APPOINTED SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, AND CONCURRENTLY COMMANDER OF THE SAIGON-CHOLON SUBDIVISION AND OF THE THOAI NGOC HAU OPERATION WHICH SUCCEEDED IN SUBJUGATING THE HOA HAO PRIVATE ARMIES. FOR THIS HE WAS PROMOTED TO MAJOR GENERAL IN DECEMBER 1956.

5. IN FEBRUARY 1957 MINH WAS MADE COMMANDER OF THE FIRST MILITARY REGION AND DURING . TRANSITION WAS IN CHARGE OF THE NEWLY CONSTITUTED FIRST AND FIFTH MILITARY REGIONS. HE WAS RELIEVED OF THESE FUNCTIONS IN 1958 TO ATTEND THE COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE AT FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS; ON HIS RETURN HE WAS INSPECTOR GENERAL OF I CORPS AND IN DECEMBER 1958 WAS NAMED COMMANDER OF THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED FIELD COMMAND WHICH WAS TO CONDUCT COUNTER-INSURGENT OPERATIONS.

6. BY 1960 MINH'S POPULARITY AND HIS CANDID PRIVATE CRITICISMS OF THE DIEM REGIME LED THE GOVERNMENT TO KEEP HIM UNDER SURVEILLANCE. BUT HE TOOK NO PART IN THE NOVEMBER COUP ATTEMPT. IN DECEMBER 1962 DIEM REMOVED HIM FROM FIELD DUTY AND ASSIGNED HIM TO THE VESTIGIAL ROLE OF SPECIAL MILITARY ADVISER TO THE PRESIDENCY. BY 1963 HE GRADUALLY BEGAN TO INVOLVE HIMSELF IN COUP PLANNING, AND HIS LACK OF A COMMAND POSITION PERMITTED HIM TO AVOID IDENTIFICATION WITH THE REPRESSION OF THE BUDDHISTS IN AUGUST. IN NOVEMBER OF THAT YEAR HE LED THE MILITARY COUP WHICH BROUGHT DIEM DOWN.

7. IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT MINH ASSUMED THE ROLES OF CHAIRMAN OF THE MILITARY REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND CHIEF OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF. HE WAS VERY POPULAR WITH THE ARMY AND THE PEOPLE ALIKE, BUT HE SHOWED LITTLE APPETITE OR APTITUDE FOR THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF HIS JOB, AND IN JANUARY 1964 HE WAS REMOVED IN A BLOODLESS COUP LED BY GEN NGUYEN KHANH.

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8. KHANH CLAIMED THAT FOUR GENERALS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH MINH WERE INVOLVED IN NEUTRALIST PLOTS WITH THE FRENCH. MINH WAS SAID TO HAVE VIET CONG CONNECTIONS THROUGH A BROTHER WHO WAS A VC GENERAL, AND IT WAS ALSO CHARGED THAT HE HAD DONE LITTLE TO IMPROVE THE GOVERNMENT'S MILITARY POSTURE OR DEAL WITH THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS ARISING OUT OF DIEM'S FALL. IN ORDER TO AVOID BLOODSHED, MINH DID NOT RESIST THE KHANH COUP AND SHORTLY THEREAFTER KHANH PERSUADED HIM TO STAY ON AS CHIEF OF STATE AND SUPREME MILITARY ADVISER TO THE MRC, IN WHICH CAPACITY HE WAS TO TRAVEL AROUND THE COUNTRY AND RALLY POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

9. IN AUGUST 1964 KHANH'S ATTEMPT TO TAKE MORE EXTENSIVE POWERS LED TO RIOTING WHICH FORCED HIS RESIGNATION. MINH THEN BECAME THE HEAD OF A THREE-MAN PROVISIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE WHICH ALSO INCLUDED KHANH AND GENERAL TRAN THANH KIEM AND WHICH GRADUALLY STEERED THE COUNTRY BACK TOWARD CIVILIAN RULE. WHEN CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WAS ESTABLISHED IN OCTOBER 1964, MINH LEFT VIET-NAM FOR A TOUR OF HAWAII AND SOUTHEAST ASIA AS ROVING AMBASSADOR.

10. IN DECEMBER 1964 THE HUONG GOVERNMENT PRESENTED TO CHIEF OF STATE PHAN KHAC SUU A DRAFT LAW RETIRING ALL MILITARY OFFICERS WITH 25 OR MORE YEARS OF SERVICE. MINH AND SOME OF HIS CLOSE COLLEAGUES WERE AMONG THE MOST PROMINENT OF THOSE TO BE AFFECTED. THE CIVILIAN ADVISORY HIGH NATIONAL COUNCIL ADVISED SUU NOT TO SIGN IT, WHEREUPON THE ARMED FORCES COUNCIL, PRODDED BY THE YOUNG TURKS, DISSOLVED THE HIGH NATIONAL COUNCIL. THE LAW WENT INTO EFFECT EARLY IN 1965 AND MINH WAS THEN RETIRED.

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11. SINCE EARLY 1965 GEN MINH HAS SPENT MOST OF HIS TIME IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES OF ASIA MINOR AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. FOR THE PAST YEAR MINH HAS LIVED IN BANGKOK, OFFICIALLY RETIRED FROM THE ARMY BUT STILL DRAWING A PENSION AS FORMER CHIEF OF STATE AND A SALARY AS ROVING AMBASSADOR. HE HAS SOUGHT TO RETURN TO VIET-NAM BUT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN UNWILLING TO AGREE, PARTLY BECAUSE IT IS CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT ROLE HE MIGHT PLAY AND PARTLY BECAUSE HIS RETURN WOULD OPEN UP THE QUESTION OF THE RETURN OF OTHER RETIRED GENERALS LIVING OVERSEAS.

12. ON JUNE 28 MINH GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE IN BANGKOK,

COMPLAINING THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOT ALLOWING HIM TO RETURN HOME OR TO FILE HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THEN, ON JUNE 30, HIS RUNNING MATE TRAN NGOC LIENG FILED PAPERS FOR THE LIST AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. ON JULY 6 LEADING GENERALS FILED COMPLAINT AGAINST MINH CANDIDACY ON GROUNDS OF NATIONAL SECURITY.

13. LIENG WAS BORN IN 1923 IN VINH LONG PROVINCE, SOUTHERN VIET-NAM. HE GRADUATED FROM THE LAW FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HANOI IN 1948 AND WAS ADMITTED TO LAW PRACTICE IN 1951 AND TO THE BAR OF SAIGON IN 1954. IN MID-1963 HE WAS DEFENSE ATTORNEY IN THE TRIALS OF THE PERSONS IMPLICATED IN THE UNSUCCESSFUL ANTI-DIEM COUP ATTEMPT OF NOVEMBER 1960. IN MARCH 1964 HE WAS THIRD DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE QUANG DUC BUDDHISTS ASSOCIATION.

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14. WHEN THE WAR CABINET FORMED IN JULY 1965 LIENG WAS ASKED TO SERVE AS COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL WELFARE. HE HELD THE POSITION THROUGH SEVERAL CABINET RESHUFFLES, BUT IN OCTOBER 1966 HE AND SEVERAL OTHER SOUTHERN CABINET MINISTERS BECAME ANGRY WITH PREMIER KY OVER THE KY GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED NORTHERN REGIONALIST BIAS AND POLICE-STATE TACTICS. LIENG WAS ONE OF FOUR MINISTERS TO CARRY OUT HIS THREAT TO RESIGN.

15. IN A JUNE 30 PRESS CONFERENCE LIENG SAID HE DOES NOT PERSONALLY KNOW GEN MINH WELL. IF MINH IS NOT PERMITTED TO RETURN TO VIET-NAM LIENG WILL CAMPAIGN ON BEHALF OF THE WHOLE TICKET.

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